
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 106 (File 315, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION AND ENSURING SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATES.

SUMMARY:

This bill (1) makes several changes with regard to the responsibilities of school districts to address bullying, (2) allows educational courses to qualify as a Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) work activity, and (3) establishes a competitive early childhood grant program.

Concerning bullying, it requires separate meetings with the parents or guardians of a bullying victim and those of his or her assailants, rather than a combined meeting and makes related minor and conforming changes.

The bill requires the social services (DSS) and labor (DOL) commissioners to permit a Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) recipient to take educational courses as part of the requirements of her or his employability plan. They must do so as long as (1) the state complies with federal work participation requirements for the employment services program and (2) the education courses are approved by the DOL commissioner. The bill specifies the types of courses the commissioner can approve.

The bill requires the DOL commissioner, in consultation with the DSS commissioner, to implement policies and procedures to (1) establish which programs may qualify as an approved employment activity and (2) enrollment and academic requirements for students who receive TFA benefits.

The bill cannot be construed as requiring the state to pay the tuition of any TFA recipient.

Finally, the bill allows the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to competitive grant for up to three alliance school districts to develop and implement a strategy to promote the social and emotional well-being and health of children from age three to third grade. If the office offers this grant, it must do so in collaboration with the State Department of Education (SDE). The program must focus on instructional tools and family engagement. Funds for this grant may come from public, private, federal, or philanthropic sources. Up to 5% of the grant funds can be used to pay administrative costs.

Alliance districts are the 30 lowest-performing school districts, as identified by the education commissioner.

*Senate Amendment "A" among other things, (1) retains the current definition of bullying, rather than narrowing it; (2) deletes a provision in the bill that allows a principal or his or her designee to notify a school resource officer, as an alternative to the appropriate law enforcement agency, if he or she believes that bullying constitutes criminal conduct; (3) eliminates a provision requiring each board to update its school climate plan every two years and submit it to the Department of Education; (4) eliminates changes to the roles of school committees that are responsible for developing a safe school climate; and (5) eliminates a requirement that OEC offer the grant program within available appropriations and allows up to 5% of the grant funds to be used for administrative costs.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2014

BULLYING

Safe School Climate Plans

By law, each local and regional board of education must develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address bullying in its schools. Under current law, the plan must require a school to invite the parents or guardians of (1) a student who commits a verified act of bullying and (2) the bully's victim to a meeting to discuss the measures the school is taking to ensure the victim's safety and prevent further bullying. The bill instead requires that the bully's parents or guardians

be invited to a meeting, separate from the one held with the victim's parents or guardians, to discuss specific interventions the school has undertaken to prevent further bullying.

By law, the plan must require the safe school climate specialist to investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly. The bill additionally requires that the parents or guardians of the student alleged to have committed an act or acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such alleged act or acts were directed receive prompt notice that such investigation has begun

The bill requires that the annual notice that must be provided under the plan to students and their parents on how students can anonymously report bullying be provided at the beginning of each school year.

Bullying Intervention and School Climate Improvement Strategy

Under current law, the plan must include a "prevention and intervention strategy." The bill allows the strategy to include, in addition to the already authorized components, culturally competent school-based curricula on social-emotional learning, self-awareness, and self-regulation. By law, the strategy can include interventions for the bullied child. The bill defines these to include (1) referrals to a school counselor, psychologist, or other appropriate social or mental health services and (2) periodic follow-up by the safe school climate specialist with the child. The bill allows funding for the strategy to come from public, private, federal, or philanthropic sources.

TAKING COURSES TO MEET TFA REQUIREMENTS

Unless they are exempt, able-bodied adults in households receiving TFA must engage in work activity as a condition of receiving ongoing TFA. Federal law allows specified educational programs to count as work activity.

By law, DSS must assess each person found eligible for time-limited TFA benefits to develop an employability plan for him or her. DSS

must then refer the person to DOL which, with the regional workforce development board, must finalize the plan and identify the services the person needs to fulfill the plan (CGS § 17b-689c).

Under the bill, the DSS and DOL commissioners must permit a TFA recipient to take education courses as part of the requirements of the recipient's employability plan as long as (1) the state complies with federal work participation requirements for the state's employment services program and (2) the education courses are approved under the bill.

The bill allows the DOL commissioner, in consultation with the DSS commissioner, approve education courses as required employment activities for a TFA recipient to the extent permissible under federal law. Eligible courses can include: (1) two- or four-year college degree programs and (2) high school graduate equivalency degree or basic education programs for recipients otherwise ineligible to enroll in these programs during their first 20 hours per week of required employment activities.

The bill requires the DOL commissioner, in consultation with the DSS commissioner, to implement policies and procedures to establish (1) which programs may qualify as an approved employment activity and (2) enrollment and academic requirements for students who are TFA recipients. The labor commissioner must implement these policies and procedures while adopting them as regulations, as long as he provides notice of intent to adopt the regulations not later than 20 days after implementing the interim policies and procedures.

The interim policies and procedures are valid until the final regulations go into effect.

The bill cannot be construed as requiring the state to pay the tuition of any TFA recipient.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18 Nay 0 (03/18/2014)

Education Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 28 Nay 3 (04/16/2014)

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 8 Nay 2 (04/23/2014)